DC

27
SEPT 95

JUSTICE LEAGUE® TASK FORCE™

DESPERO™

DON'T GET ON HIS *BAD* SIDE.

NITRO PLAZM

PRIEST
BERNADO
WALLACE
CRAMER

...UH OH.

TOO LATE!

--AND SO, IT'S **OFFICIAL.** HAVING BEEN GRANTED ***IMMUNITY FROM PROSECUTION*** IN THE HIT-AND-RUN DEATH OF NINE-YEAR-OLD BONITA PHILLIPS--

--EDDIE "TERMINATOR" SANABRIA, THE PROSECUTION'S STAR WITNESS AGAINST ALLEGED DRUG KINGPIN **DANNY RIVERA,** WAS SET FREE TODAY WHEN THE GOVERNMENT'S CASE AGAINST RIVERA CONCLUDED.

LOCAL CIVIL RIGHTS GROUPS ARE FLOODING THE MAYOR'S OFFICE WITH DEMANDS FOR ***JUSTICE FOR THE LITTLE PHILLIPS GIRL--***

--AN INNOCENT VICTIM OF VIOLENT CRIME. *

A SPOKESMAN FROM THE QUEENS COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE CALLED SANABRIA'S RELEASE "DISTURBING AND UNFORTUNATE."

*SEE TRIUMPH #1 FOR SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THIS CASE.
--ROO

I AM A CROOK.

HI, MA!

PROSECUTORS, BUOYED BY THEIR SPECTACULAR DISMANTLING OF DANNY RIVERA'S CRIMINAL EMPIRE, HAVE PLEDGED THEMSELVES TO GET SANABRIA OFF THE STREETS FOR GOOD.

WHAT PROSECUTORS ARE AT A LOSS TO SAY, THOUGH--

PROLOGUE: MEANWHILE, DESPERO...

--IS HOW.

FOR 327 EARTH-YEARS L-RON HAS BEEN A SERVANT.

A SIMPLE, HUMBLE DROID CHARGED WITH DOING HIS MASTER'S BIDDING.

MORE THAN THREE CENTURIES SPENT SHINING SHOES...

...FETCHING DRINKS.

HIS DEMURE STATURE AND IGNOBLE CASING DESIGN RELEGATING HIM TO THE MOST MENIAL OF TASKS AND INVITING RIDICULE AND SCORN FROM ALL WHO KNEW HIM.

THAT WAS THEN.

NOW, L-RON'S CONSCIOUSNESS HAS BEEN DEPOSITED INSIDE THE DORMANT BRAIN OF THE RAVAGER KNOWN AS DESPERO.

PERHAPS THE MOST FEARED OF INTERGALACTIC VILLAINS, DESPERO'S NAME IS A GREAT AND TERRIBLE LEGEND THROUGHOUT THE COSMOS.

DESPERO IS FEARED AND RESPECTED.

DESPERO IS TALL.

AND NOW FATE HAS PLACED THAT FEARSOME REPUTATION AND POWER INTO L-RON'S HANDS.

HE INTENDS TO USE THAT POWER RESPONSIBLY.

QUEENS PLAZA IS NEXT...

IT'S A *PROP*, BILLY. A *TOY*.

YAY, MAN.

YAY, MAN.

DAMN STRAIGHT!

DID A *ITO* ALL UP IN THAT PIECE. "YO, JUDGE--BACK UP OFF ME!"

YAY, MAN. WORD. HOLONNASEC.

MORE SOAP, BABY-GIRL.

YAY, MAN.

BOOM

JEEZ--!!

GET OUT.

NOT YOU.

WHA' CHOO WANT, MAN?

HE HAS TO BE SURE.

GUILTY OR INNOCENT?

DESPERO'S THIRD EYE WILL TELL HIM.

THE EYE HAS TELEPATHIC AND HYPNOTIC ABILITIES.

GGGHAAK--!

GUILTY OR INNOCENT?

INNOCENT OR GUILTY?

W-WAIT-- HOL-HOLLON-- I CAN EXPLAIN, MAN--

KRAA-WHOOOM

KER-A-THA

GUILTY.

SUBWAY

SUBWAY

SHORTLY...

...ALERT...ALL TASK FORCE MEMBERS ASSEMBLE IN THE WAR ROOM IMMEDIATELY... ALERT...

J'ONN--IT'S L-RON.

AND WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN, MY FRIEND--?

SHUT DOWN, J'ONN. I'M AFRAID MY AUTOSTART MAY NEED CALIBRATING--I DIDN'T HEAR YOUR ALERT.

NO MATTER, ASSEMBLE THE TEAM IMMEDIATELY.

I'M ON MY WAY.

CLICK!

--WITNESSES SAY THE ENTIRE APARTMENT EXPLODED, KILLING SANABRIA IN WHAT IS OBVIOUSLY A REVENGE KILLING--

--A POLICE LIEUTENANT IS QUOTED AS SAYING SANABRIA, WHO IS RUMORED TO HAVE BEEN PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATHS OF MORE THAN A DOZEN VICTIMS, QUOTE, "WILL NOT BE MISSED."

FROM *PRECISELY* THIS MOMENT FORWARD YOU WILL OBEY MY ORDERS TO THE *LETTER,* TRIUMPH--

--OR YOU SHALL *ANSWER* TO *ME.*

--I'M *SCARED.* I *CAN'T BEAT HIM.*

EVERY MINUTE THAT PASSES, *DEATH MASQUE* BECOMES AN EVEN *GREATER* THREAT, AND I CAN'T STOP HIM.

SORRY, RAY. CAN'T HELP YOU.

WHAT--?!

YOU'RE STILL TICKED BECAUSE I *QUIT* THE TASK FORCE--?! HOW *SHALLOW* CAN YOU *BE*--?

I GIVE AS GOOD AS I GET, RAY--

--YOU *WALKED OUT* ON US--

NOW, *YOU* GET TO FACE *THIS* ALONE.

THIS STINKS, TRIUMPH-- BLOWING RAY OFF LIKE THIS.

I CAN'T BELIEVE J'ONN OKAYED THIS.

HE DIDN'T. *I* MADE THE DECISION.

BLEEPBLEEPBLEEP

OBEY MY ORDERS TO THE *LETTER,* TRIUMPH--

--OR YOU SHALL *ANSWER* TO *ME.*

--OR YOU SHALL *ANSWER* TO *ME.*

BLEEPBLEEPBLEEP

BLEEPBLEEPBLEEP

PHONE.

BLEEPBLEEPBLEEP

MAN... WHAT TIME IS IT...?

MUST'VE... DOZED OFF...

BLEEPBLEEPBLEEP

AAAAAHHH--!

Oh--Oh MAN--

--FORGOT--

...KEEP... FORGETTING...

...STILL NEW AT BEING *HANDICAPPED*--NO, WAIT-- WE'RE NOT "*HANDI-CAPPED*" ANYMORE--WE'RE "*PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED.*"

MY CHALLENGE IS NOT TO *BLACK OUT* FROM THE *PAIN* WHEN I FIRST WAKE UP--

--BEFORE I REMEMBER TO USE MY *POWERS* TO RELIEVE THE *PRESSURE* ON MY *FRACTURED SPINE.* *

32 MILLION IN THE BANK--AND COMPLETELY *IMMOBILE*...

BLEEPBLEEPBLEEP

YEAH, YEAH... WHO'S ON THE PHONE--?

--oh. Hi, GYPSY.

WILL, I'VE BEEN THINKING--

YOU'VE GOT TO TELL J'ONN.

*TRIUMPH BROKE HIS BACK IN TRIUMPH #4, WHICH IS STILL ON SALE-- ROO

TELL J'ONN WHAT?

THAT YOU BLEW RAY OFF. THAT IT'S *YOUR* FAULT RAY'S WORKING FOR VANDAL SAVAGE. *

GYPSY-- THAT'S STUPID--

IS IT?

WILL, VANDAL SAVAGE *HATES* J'ONN-- HE'D STOP AT *NOTHING* TO GET HIS REVENGE-- INCLUDING HURTING RAY!

GYPSY--

--GOING TO VANDAL WAS RAY'S IDEA. AND I THINK WE'RE LUCKY TO HAVE FOUND OUT WHICH SIDE OF THE STREET RAY'S WORKING.

HE QUIT THE TASK FORCE, GYPSY. ** SCREW HIM.

NO, YOU DOPE--

--RAY'S CARRYING A LOT OF GUILT SINCE THAT PLANE CRASH. *** HE'S DESPERATE TO DEFEAT THAT "MASK OF DEATH" GUY.

HE THOUGHT YOU WERE HIS FRIEND.

--I HAD TO FIND OUT JUST *HOW* BUGGY RAY IS. NOW WE KNOW.

RAY IS UNHINGED... *DANGEROUS*. AND I THINK IT'S *BETTER* WE FOUND OUT.

YOU'VE GOTTA TELL J'ONN, WILL.

AND I THOUGHT RAY WAS *MINE*. THEN HE *WALKED OUT* ON US.

YOU'RE *RIGHT*, GYPSY. RAY HAS BEEN BUGGY SINCE THAT PLANE THING. THAT'S *WHY* I BLEW HIM OFF--

*RAY #14, **TF #26, ***RAY ANNUAL #1--CONTINUITY ROO

I'M TELLING YOU, BOY--

--THESE THINGS HAVE A WAY OF BLOWING UP IN YOUR *FACE*--

NO, I THINK RAY AND I WILL WORK THIS OUT OURSELVES.

SKEEEE--!

CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER

THE SHIPYARDS AT DARGATH, NEW RIIHAD.

DUSK.

THE MAN'S NAME IS **DEATH MASQUE.**

HE IS THE DE-FACTO **RULER** OF NEW RIIHAD, A POSTAGE-STAMP NATION IN NORTH AFRICA.

DEATH MASQUE IS A **DESTROYER.** A **SLAYER.** A RUTHLESS, MERCILESS DEMON POSSESSED OF **VAST** AND TERRIBLE POWERS.

RAY **BOUGHT** HIM FROM CIRCUIT SHACK FOR $65 PLUS TWO SHACK ATTACK COUPONS.

GOOD.

VERY GOOD.

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GLAD YOU DIG IT.

HERE'S SOME MORE.

WHHAAAAMMM

ZZZAACK!!

HE THINKS I'M GONNA FOLLOW HIM--

--GO DOWN THERE.

HE'S WRONG.

VERY WRONG.

DEAD WRONG.

IN FACT, MAYBE FOR THE *FIRST TIME*--

WHAAAM!

--I'VE MADE THE MONSTER *THINK.*

KRRR-OOOMM!!

FOR *ONCE*, HE'S NOT RUNNING *RINGS* AROUND ME.

FOR ONCE-- THIS ONE TIME--

--I'M *WINNING.*

I'M *BEATING* DEATH MASQUE.

MAN...WHAT A *FEELING...!*

NOTHING'S GONNA STOP ME *NOW*--

WILMA, WHERE'S MY MARK?

Huh?

HUH?!

FOURTEEN DEGREES ANGLE LEFT, WILL. AS IF THAT WILL BE ANY USE TO YOU.

WILL, THE GUY MOVES LIKE GOVERNMENT CHEESE IN APPALACHIA.

HE'S FAST, WILL. TOO FAST FOR THE ROTOJET'S SENSORS TO TRACK EFFECTIVELY.

*I LEARNED THE HARD WAY--**

--YOU TAKE ON THE RAY-- YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN.

I'LL KEEP THAT IN MIND. I'M GONNA PUT ONE ACROSS HIS NOSE.

CAN'T AUTOLOCK ON THIS SUCKER, WILL. YOU BETTER RETARD THE BURST--KEEP THAT PUPPY FROM FLASHING BACK AT YOU.

NO PROB, WILMA. BESIDES--

*SEE THE RAY #14 -- ROO.

--I JUST WANT TO GET HIS ATTENTION.

=UGHNNN--!!=

FWOOSH

Oh.

I SEE.

THIS IS WHERE WE'RE GOING--

--THE JUSTICE LEAGUE TASK FORCE COME TO SCREW UP MY DAY.

RAY-- YOU MUST CEASE THIS SENSELESS ATTACK IMMEDIATELY.

NO OFFENSE, J'ONN, BUT I DON'T TAKE ORDERS FROM YOU ANYMORE.

YOU DON'T KNOW THE WHOLE STORY HERE--

THAT WAS NOT A REQUEST.

uh-oh.

LOSING IT.

NUTS... NUTS...

DON'T KNOW WHAT J'ONN'S *MARTIAN VISION* IS MADE OF--

HEY, Mr. MAN--GOT SOMETHING FOR YOU.

--NO--THAT *MYSTEK* KID--

TRIUMPH--

BETTER *PUNCH IT--*

--RAY'S ON THE *MOVE.*

WILMA-- WHERE'S MY MARK?

YOU'RE *JOKING,* RIGHT?

WILL--

--THAT GUY'S MOVING **130 KNOTS.** HE'LL BE OFF MY SCREEN IN FOUR SECONDS.

PLOTTING INTERCEPT--GONNA LIGHT 'EM UP. *

WELL, TRIUMPH--

--IT'S OFFICIALLY A **MESS.** 'FESS UP TIME.

SHUT UP.

*THE FIGHTER JET CLASS AFTER-BURNERS ON THE ROTOJET.--ROO

EXCUSE ME--?

NOT YOU, WILMA.

YOU NEED SOME **BACK-UP,** CHIEF ?

NEGATIVE, WILMA. KEEP MONITORING.

FINE. HEY, L-RON--

--YOU STILL WITH US ?

I AM MONITORING.

I AM CERTAIN THE SITUATION WILL RESOLVE ITSELF SHORTLY...

WAKE UP... WAKE UP...

...CAN'T...FOCUS... J'ONN'S RAY BLAST... SCRAMBLED MY ATOMS OR SOMETHING...

MYSTEK'S ENERGY... IT'S NOT **LIGHT**-BASED LIKE MINE... IT'S **SUBATOMIC**-- DRAWN FROM **QUARKS**--

NEITHER MYSTEK NOR J'ONN CAN KEEP UP WITH ME--BUT MYSTEK STILL CONTROLS HIS ENERGY BOLT...

...GREAT... CAN'T OUTRUN IT...

...CAN'T KEEP MY **EYES** OPEN...

KRAWWWM

SORRY, J'ONN... I'M A LITTLE BUSY PASSING OUT RIGHT NOW...

ANSWER ME.

WELL... IT'S KIND OF A LONG STORY...

HMMM... LET'S SEE...

...DEATH MASQUE... DEATH MASQUE...

...DEATH MASQUE IS A CUSTOM REFIT OF A VIDEO GAME PROGRAM. A CONSTRUCT OF SOLID LIGHT, USED AS A TRAINING TOOL.

MASQUE HAS SOMEHOW BECOME INDEPENDENT OF YOU AND HAS RECENTLY TURNED MURDEROUS--

--ATTACKING A JET LINER MERELY TO TEACH YOU A LESSON.

MOST RECENTLY, MASQUE HAS TAKEN OVER A POSTAGE-STAMP NORTH AFRICAN NATION --INSTALLED A BOY AS MONARCH.*

*RAY #13--ROO

HE'S AMASSING POWER.

TRYING TO SEDUCE YOU WITH IT. SHOW YOU YOUR TRUE POTENTIAL.

HE WILL EXPECT SOME DIRECT CONFRONTATION.

MASQUE KNOWS EVERYTHING ABOUT YOU. HE ANTICIPATES YOUR EVERY MOVE.

YOUR ONLY HOPE OF DEFEATING SUCH AN OPPONENT--

--IS TO STOP BEING *MYSELF.* TO MOVE *BEYOND* DEATH MASQUE'S RANGE OF *AVAILABLE INFORMATION.*

KEEP HIM ON THE DEFENSIVE.

I HAVE SEEN THIS "*DEATH MASQUE.*"

Y-YOU *HAVE--?*

IN PHILADELPHIA --AT THE CRASH SITE.

HE VANISHED WITHOUT COMMENT OR INCIDENT.*

*LAST ISH--ROO

GET OVER THERE, WILL.

THAT'S *YOUR* MESS. FIX IT WHILE YOU STILL CAN.

THIS IS *BORING.* WHEN DO WE GET TO BEAT UP ON RAY AGAIN--?

AND *THIS* IS SAVAGE'S ADVICE--?

--DESTROY NEW RIIHAD'S SHIPYARDS? A CIVILIAN INDUSTRY POSING *NO THREAT*--?

IF YOU INVESTIGATE MORE *CLOSELY,* J'ONN, YOU'LL FIND OUT NEW RIIHAD'S PRIMARY EXPORT ISN'T *SHIPS* OR *OIL*--

--IT'S *DRUGS.*

THE RELIGIOUS ZEALOTS AND *ELITE* CLASS OF NEW RIIHAD ACCEPT *SUBSTANTIAL* HONORARIUMS FROM SOME OF THE GLOBE'S MOST *RUTHLESS* AND *UNSAVORY* CHARACTERS.

YES, THIS WILL BE FINE.

DESTROY NEW RIIHAD'S ILLICIT ECONOMY, AND YOU WILL DESTABILIZE THE AREA AND CREATE A DIVERSION MASQUE WILL NEED TO DEAL WITH.

ANY UNFORESEEN INITIATIVES ON YOUR PART WILL ACCRUE TO YOUR ADVANTAGE.

CORRUPT MASQUE'S INTERNAL LOGIC--

--AND HE'S YOURS.

YOUR ALLIANCE WITH VANDAL SAVAGE IS WHAT TROUBLES ME *MOST,* RAY--

--HIS MOTIVES ARE *HIGHLY* SUSPECT.

I NEEDED *HELP,* J'ONN. SOMEBODY WHO COULD *OUTPLAN* DEATH MASQUE.

AFTER TRIUMPH TURNED ME DOWN, IT DAWNED ON ME THAT I DON'T WANT TO PUT ANY OF MY *FRIENDS* IN THE LINE OF FIRE.

I MEAN, IF MASQUE WHACKS SAVAGE-- WHO'LL *CARE?*

LOOK-- I'M SORRY IF YOU DON'T APPROVE, J'ONN.

WE CAN FIGHT ALL DAY ABOUT THIS--

--OR YOU CAN *TRUST* ME. IN ANY CASE--

"--I'VE MADE MY *DECISION.*"

AND THERE HE GOES.

WELL, TRIUMPH, I'D IMAGINE YOUR WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY IS SLAMMING SHUT RIGHT ABOUT NOW--

TRIUMPH.

WHAAAAM!!

WHA--?

--J'ONN--
ARE YOU
NUTS--?

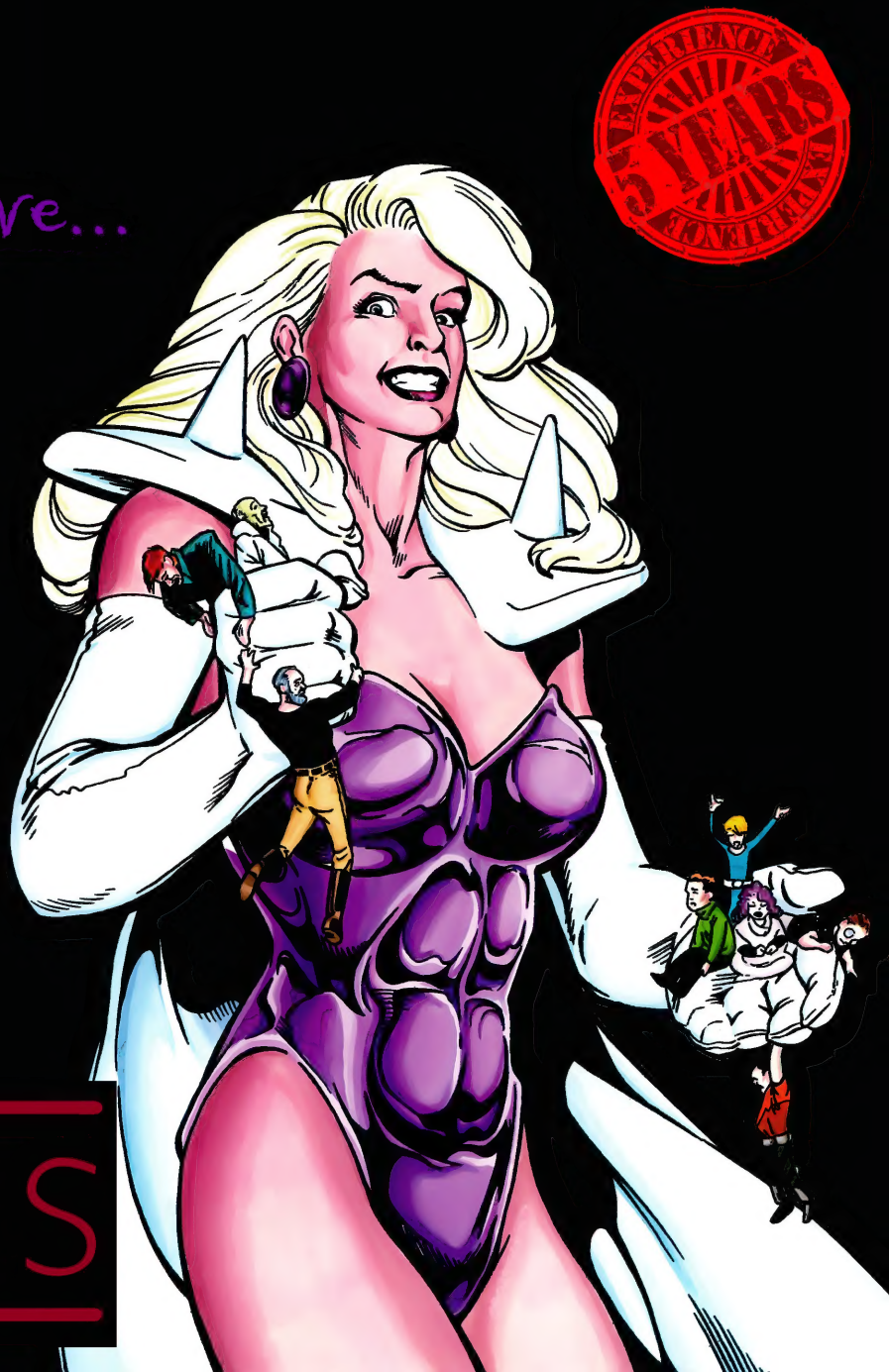
TRIUMPH,
I'VE *WARNED* YOU
REPEATEDLY ABOUT
YOUR IMPULSIVE
AND RECKLESS
ACTIONS.

I HAVE
EXHAUSTED ALL
AVENUES OF
PERSUASION--

--SAVE
ONE...

NEXT-- **INNOCENT**
(DEATH TAKES A COFFEE BREAK)

From Baaldur, with love...



GLORITH

novus